

Testimony of Douglas Ray Killen II - Coal Miner
Before the House Appropriations Committee
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
March 18, 2015

Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and members of this subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity. My name is Doug Killen; I am a husband and father of seven. I am also a very proud coal miner. I am here today to speak to you about the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its war on coal.

I am employed at the Hobet Mine Complex in West Virginia. At this mine alone, we have lost at least 150 men and women due to the EPA's regulatory overreach. The EPA has always downplayed the impact their actions have on jobs, but if they came to West Virginia, they'd see just how much we're suffering due to their actions. In West Virginia alone, nearly 2,500 surface mine jobs have been lost since 2005. Our state can't absorb those job losses.

We as miners have fought many fights and have struggled through many adversities. We are a tough breed, and we are proud of our work and our traditions. Our fathers, grandfathers and even great-grandfathers have been miners here in West Virginia. We have went from spending script at the company store living as rats to making a decent wage and making a decent living for our families. We have been able to afford to send our children to college, buy houses, and make a better future for our families. Now with all the cutbacks and closing of mines, we are forced to take lower-paying jobs and sign up on government assistance. Even more so, some families have had to pack up and move out of this beautiful state that we love in order to find work.

I have watched my brother move away for work, my family's business dwindle, and friends' businesses close down all due to downsizing at the mines. We have entire towns that have turned to ghost towns in West Virginia as an effect of what the EPA has done. The EPA is asking for a half-billion dollar increase in their budget, a budget that will continue to fight coal production, its companies, and its workers.

Patriot, the company where I work, has filed for bankruptcy. As a company, they have spent tens of millions of dollars on selenium containment. The rules and regulations promoted by EPA's policies have driven the price of production through the roof. In any business, you need to manage costs in order to stay profitable and employ workers. In order to be a cost-effective mine, we all have to watch costs. Unfortunately, the EPA does not have any regard for the cost of their regulations. They are adding a tremendous amount to our production cost, making it nearly impossible to stay in business. As they increase our costs, it forces a lot of mines to go out of business or lay off employees.

I am here today to ask on behalf of West Virginians and coal miners across this nation: please fight for us. The EPA continues to destroy our livelihoods. Enough is enough. I'm a foster parent, and with the economic downturn comes poverty. Then, with the struggle of life, kids get neglected and forgotten about. We need to spend money on the problems we already have, not to create new ones.

The EPA is overstepping its bounds. For example, in West Virginia, the EPA is retroactively vetoing already-issued permits. The permit for the mine in Logan County was issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers after a thorough process. Families in the area were counting on the new jobs this mine would create. But the EPA's decision not to let this approved mine move forward took away the promise of good-paying jobs and more affordable energy.

I would just like to thank the committee for giving me this chance to speak with all my heart. Respectfully, I ask that you look to fund the core functions of the EPA – the agency that we have traditionally known and worked alongside. They are overstepping their reach and hurting the fine men and women of West Virginia and their families. We as coal miners have changed everything we done in the past to make things right. We're not asking for special treatment, just for a fair chance. I am a coal miner just like my brothers and sisters at the mines. We are only asking to mine coal and create a good life for our families.